

Could Jesus Have Sinned?

Hebrews 4:15 — Could Jesus have sinned? If we believe that Jesus was both God and man, He could not have sinned without involving and compromising His Deity. Therefore, it was not possible for Him to have sinned. Scripture teaches plainly in many passages, the absolute Deity of Christ, One such passage is John 1:1-3: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” This is a clear statement that the Being called “the Word” was God and coeternal with the Father. It also makes clear that the Word had divine power and was, in fact, the actual Creator of all things. Verse 14 then states that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.” The next verse relates the testimony of John the Baptist: “This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me.” This positively identifies Jesus as the One called the Word. There can be no doubt of the Deity of Christ. This guarantees what is called His “impeccability,” which means that He could not have sinned. We learn that He Who was God eternal could never change, was always holy (see Hebrews 15:8).

How could it be said that He was tempted in all points like as we are? We must not confuse temptation from without, with response from within. He had presented to Him all the categories of temptation. 1 John 2:16 states: “All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” All temptation to sin falls within these three categories. The Lord Jesus faced all three in His temptation in the wilderness, at the very beginning of His ministry. After fasting forty days it was suggested to Him to change stones into bread, both to satisfy His hunger and to prove His Deity. But He had taken upon Himself the form of a servant and hence would do nothing except His Father’s will. It was also suggested that He cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, so that the angles would bear Him up and this would display His Deity. But here again it would have been a display of pride and would have “tempted” God. Finally He was shown all the kingdoms of the world and all the glory of them in an appeal that He should worship Satan, who would then give it all to Jesus. But the Lord Jesus not only scorned this offer, He then commanded Satan to get behind Him. In resisting these three challenges, Christ had exhausted Satan’s storehouse of temptation.

If Christ could not sin, does not this invalidate the temptation? It is not the presentation of temptation from without which constitutes sin, but response from within. Resistance to temptation does not invalidate the temptation, but it vindicates the person who resists. The fact that there was nothing in the Lord Jesus to respond to sin in no way vitiates the actuality of the temptation. When gold is given the acid test it is to prove that it will not respond. If it were not pure, it would respond. The test is as genuine as the gold. Before a newly constructed bridge is put into general use, often it is tested by heavier weights than it is expected to bear. The fact that the bridge stands such a test raises no question of the reality of the test, but it establishes the validity of the bridge as a public thoroughfare. A test is not less valid because the subject passes the test.

How can Christ sympathize with us in our failures if He could not have sinned? While He did not experience failure in the sense of having any deficiency in Himself, yet He was subjected to

rejection. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not” Isaiah tells us (53:3). Further, while He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, “Yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” Prophetically it is said of Him in Psalm 102:23-24, “He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days.” Isaiah 49:4 says, “Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.” Acts 13:47 applies Isaiah 49 to the Lord Jesus, quoting from verse 6. At the end of His three and a half years of ministry the Lord Jesus had fewer disciples than Peter won on the day of Pentecost, and even His closest disciples forsook Him in the hour of His greatest trial.

Psalm 41:9 says: “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.” When this was fulfilled by Judas, the Lord Jesus said: “Friend, wherefore art thou come?” (Mt 26:50). Psalm 69:20 says: “Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.” So although the Lord Jesus had no element of deficiency in Himself, He knew the disappointments of His work not being accepted, and Himself being rejected.

In what sense was Christ “made perfect” through suffering? Does this imply previous imperfections? This expression occurs more than once in the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 2:10 we read: “For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory; to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” The word here translated “perfect” means to complete, or bring into maturity. There are many things which can only be known experimentally. Hebrews 5:8-9 says: “Though He was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.” This is amplified in 2:17-18: “Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, and He is able to succor them that are tempted.” There was no imperfection at any time. But the sufferings were very real, and accomplished the important purpose of enabling Him to be a merciful and faithful high priest for us. But this did not require that Christ should be able to sin, and we believe the other considerations show that this was not the case with Him.